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Viewing cable 05PARIS7626, FORMER PM JOSPIN DEFLECTS SPECULATION ABOUT

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05PARIS7626	2005-11-08 13:35	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Paris

Appears in these articles:
http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/documents-wikileaks/article/2011/02/09/wikileaks-les-visiteurs-de-l-ambassade_1477418_1446239.htm

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 007626

SIPDIS

DEPT ALSO FOR EUR/WE, DRL/IL, INR/EUC, EUR/ERA, EUR/PPD,
AND EB
DEPT OF COMMERCE FOR ITA
DEPT OF LABOR FOR ILAB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2015
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [EU](#) [FR](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#)
SUBJECT: FORMER PM JOSPIN DEFLECTS SPECULATION ABOUT
CANDIDACY FOR PRESIDENCY; PROJECTS POSSIBLE SOCIALIST
VICTORY IN 2007

Classified By: Ambassador Craig Stapleton for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Over lunch with Ambassador Stapleton on November 2, former prime minister Lionel Jospin said that desire for change, along with widespread disappointment with the record of President Chirac and the center-right, "puts things in place" for a center-left victory in 2007. However, he also cautioned that disarray in both the center-left and center-right could lead to a 2007 presidential election "like the one in 2002" that would offer the people "no real choice" in the second round. He stressed that, for the institutional system of the Fifth Republic to work as intended, the Presidential election has to provide a mandate to govern, resulting from a choice between two credible second-round candidates. Pressed as to his own widely rumored return to politics to unify the contentiously divided PS, Jospin stuck to his script of insisting that he was retired and that, if he entered the nomination race at this time, he would only "add to the party's division problems." Jospin's energy and his evident relish in commenting on a range of domestic and international political issues belied both his age (68) and his self-deprecating dismissals of himself as "too old" and "a man of the past." END SUMMARY.

"WE CAN WIN"

2. (C) Jospin argued that the deep divisions that are clouding the future of France's Socialist Party (PS) result from both the May 2005 referendum (when the party's

electorate largely did not follow their leadership's call to vote for the EU constitutional treaty) and the April 2002 Presidential election (when the PS, led by Jospin, failed to make it to the second round). Jospin insisted that the center-left voters' 'no' vote May 29 "was not a vote against the constitution," but "a vote against the government." Had the 2002 Presidential election not deprived voters "of a real choice between left and right" in the second and decisive round, the Constitutional referendum might not have become such a lightening rod for frustration across the electorate, particularly on the left. Jospin stressed the importance, for the sound functioning of the institutions of the Fifth Republic, that a presidential contest in France end with a clear mandate for a program and a candidate. A "non-contest" like the 2002 second round run-off between incumbent president Chirac and right-wing extremist Jean-Marie Le Pen deprived the people of the opportunity to choose between the records and policy projects of the center-right and the center-left. "Chirac didn't even bother to take the election seriously," Jospin said, "because he knew he would win."

13. (C) "If we put forward a solid program" that speaks to French voters' concerns, then, Jospin said, "we can win" in 2007. COMMENT: By "we," Jospin meant "the governmental left" -- the social democratic center of the Socialist Party (PS) that has (1981 - 86, 1988 - 93, and 1997 - 2002) controlled a majority in the National Assembly and run the government. Like many in the center of the left, Jospin believes that President Chirac's dismal record, the relatively good record associated with Jospin's tenure as prime minister (1997 - 2002) and the natural tendency in democracies to alternate centrist parties in power puts victory in 2007 well within reach of a moderate, credible Socialist Party candidate. END COMMENT.

14. (C) Pressed as to who that PS candidate might be, Jospin resolutely struck to his script of insisting the party had first "to decide on a program" (at the upcoming party congress in mid-November), and then move on to "rallying behind whichever candidate emerges as the party standard-bearer." Jospin drew a (questionable) parallel with his own, "unexpected" emergence as leader of party and spokesperson for its platform. (Note: In 1991, after President Mitterrand had hounded his prime minister -- and long-time rival for leadership of PS -- Michel Rocard out of office, Jospin, a Mitterrand protege, succeeded Rocard. End note.) Jospin said he envisioned the adoption of a party platform prompting the "natural emergence" of a spokesperson for it -- the PS's candidate for 2007.

JOSPINS OWN AMBITIONS

15. Jospin refused to comment on who he thought would eventually emerge as the Socialists' candidate for the Presidency in 2007, although he appeared to exclude Laurent Fabius. Prompted to comment on his own ambitious, he was consistent throughout the meeting -- as he has been in public -- in refusing to rule himself definitively either in or out of the race. On the one hand, he insisted on several occasions that it was time to pass the baton to the next generation and that he was not actively campaigning. On the other hand, his continued references to his recently published book and his insistence that the party needed to define its program before it chooses its standard-bearer suggested that he might still view himself as a potential unifier.

U.S.-FRANCE RELATIONS -- AND IRAQ AND THE UN

16. (C) Jospin went to great lengths to affirm his admiration for the U.S. and his conviction that shared, core values unite the U.S. and France (and Europe) despite deep divisions over Iraq and the role of multilateral institutions. Jospin was skeptical that democratic self-government can be created in a society unadapted to it, while acknowledging that U.S. withdrawal from Iraq would only lead to chaos. Jospin also lamented what he called the U.S.'s "turning away" from its historical nurturing and legitimization of multilateral institutions, such as the UN. Notwithstanding these differences, Jospin insisted that part of being allies and friends was the freedom to disagree about important matters and say so. While he agreed with French policy on Iraq, he had strongly disapproved of President Chirac's decision to brandish publicly the threat of a French veto. Jospin also commented that multilateral agreements (for example, on Climate Change, Landmines, and an International Criminal Court) that may seem unworkable to the U.S. nevertheless have great "symbolic importance," and that the U.S. underestimates the damage done to its international standing in opposing them.

IRAN

17. (C) Jospin said Iran's aggressive rhetoric contradicted its stated desire to play a more constructive role in the international community. Iran's ambitions as a regional

power -- indeed, as a new rallying point for Islamic civilization -- Jospin implied, contradicted its claim to want nuclear energy purely for peaceful purposes. He nevertheless added that it "remained to be seen" what Iran's real intentions were, but then wondered whether recent statements by Iranian President Ahmijihad calling for Israel's destruction constituted a "turning point" beyond which there is no return.

COMMENT

18. (C) Jospin's remarkable energy and voluble, forward-looking engagement across a range of issues belied both his age (68) and his self-deprecating insistence that he was retired and without specific plans for the future. While it is tempting to take his protestations at face value, there is also room for skepticism. Many experienced observers, in the press and in the political class, would argue that Jospin may well end in the right place at the right time as the presidential candidate judged most capable of leading the PS and uniting the center-left electorate in 2007. Jospin's just published book -- a crisp and comprehensive, if often commonplace, overview of the situation facing France and what to do about it -- lends credence to the view that, even if he is not actively plotting his return to power, he is carefully avoiding closing the door on a possible return. The success of such a strategy -- to win the PS nomination by not running for it -- depends on his concealing his goal until it's clearly inevitable. Whether or not it will become inevitable -- that the party concludes it has no other winner in 2007 except him -- remains to be seen.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>
Stapleton